

November 10, 2008

Mr. Neil Pedersen, Administrator
State Highway Administration
707 N. Calvert Street
C400
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Mr. Pederson:

As property owners along Connecticut Avenue (MD 185) between Washington Beltway exit 33 (Chevy Chase) and Jones Bridge Road in Chevy Chase, Maryland, we wish to express our serious concerns about traffic improvement plans for the Connecticut Avenue-Jones Bridge Road Intersection in Chevy Chase, MD. This intersection is proposed for improvements to accommodate anticipated increased traffic as a result of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) project which is in the process of preparing to move Walter Reed Army Hospital to the Bethesda Naval Hospital campus.

Since we use the Jones Bridge Road-Connecticut Avenue intersection every day, we are aware of the need to improve congestion during rush hours. We also concur that it is likely that the BRAC will bring more traffic to this and other intersections in the Bethesda area unless Bethesda Naval/Walter Reed has its own access ramp from the Beltway. However, we urge you to consider three issues/suggestions as you proceed with planning for these improvements:

- (1) We strongly oppose any option that would result in taking any property from homeowners on or adjacent to Connecticut Avenue - an option that we understand is under consideration;
- (2) We urge, instead of taking any property from homeowners abutting Connecticut, that the State seriously (and creatively) explore the option of using the space occupied by the existing fifteen foot median strip on Connecticut Avenue to accomplish better traffic flow at the intersection;
- (3) Since most options for the intersection that appear to be receiving serious consideration would only result in the most minimal improvements to the intersection (From "F" To "E") at significant cost to taxpayers (whether federal or state) during very hard economic times as well as to adjacent homeowners and neighborhoods, we question whether the anticipated benefits justify the costs.

Our rationales for urging the SHA to consider these suggestions are as follows:

- (1) Widening Connecticut Avenue any distance at all up to 12 feet into our current property lines along Connecticut would seriously erode the safety and quality of life for all homeowners along Connecticut. It would bring the traffic closer to our bedrooms and living rooms, magnify the already deafening noise, increase air pollution, enhance the

vibrations from trucks and busses, make it more difficult for us to have safe access and egress onto Connecticut Avenue (with presumably a continuous turn lane moving at all times), reduce the size of our modest yards, and serve as an eyesore for our properties that have all built green barriers to try to preserve an aesthetic neighborhood feel to our residences. Some of the houses would likely end up not being habitable at all depending on how close they are to the street now.

These quality of life erosions will most certainly undermine the market values of our properties, resulting in the likely loss to each homeowner of hundreds of thousands of dollars that we currently can draw from the sale of our homes now with Connecticut Avenue close, but not perilously close. Simple payment by the State on a square footage basis for property taken would not reflect the actual overall marketability declines we would experience from having smaller lots and a state highway roaring fifteen feet closer past us day and night. Our homes will be harder to sell and we will have to sell them, if we can at all, for much lower prices than we previously have been able to secure. We may be forced to rent our properties if we can't sell them. High renter neighborhoods are generally considered less stable, less attractive, and less desirable than those with high home ownership rates - so the whole neighborhood will be impacted. Long-time residents may be forced to move completely away from our homes and our neighborhood due to receiving insufficient funds from the sale or rental of our homes to enable us to buy another home in this or a similarly located neighborhood inside the Beltway.

(2) Instead of taking any property from homeowners abutting Connecticut, we believe that planners should give serious consideration to the possibility of using the existing fifteen foot median strip to create a dual direction lane during rush hours on Connecticut Avenue, similar to those used on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, D.C. to alleviate traffic congestion. While we acknowledge that median strips improve safety and aesthetics, we observe that both Connecticut Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue have no median strip in the District. Yet, there do not appear to be an extraordinary number of accidents related to traffic travelling in two directions. The median strip on Connecticut Avenue in the Town of Kensington has only a very narrow strip of land (maybe three feet) and yet it has been beautified with plantings and serves as a separation of lanes.

(3) Finally, the "improvements" proposed to accommodate to projected increases in Bethesda Naval/Walter Reed traffic will only move this intersection modestly from an "F" (failed) to an "E" rating, yet will utilize significant amounts of taxpayer dollars. The project will remove grown trees and shrubs that serve as a green screen between homeowners and Connecticut, eliminate our fences, and involve relocation of many utility lines (water, gas, power, etc) not to mention the noise, dust and disruption that will occur which may necessitate temporary relocation of homeowners. Thus, this is a costly proposal given its limited payback in terms of traffic improvements at a time when all levels of government will be in serious financial distress due to recession and major recent federal bailouts of the financial industry that will have fiscal implications into the future. The State is currently so strapped due to people buying less gas which generates gas taxes that they have reduced by one third the funds available for the BRAC projects

in general; and it is hard to justify how the Federal government will be in a fiscal position to fund a project that yields such small traffic improvements.

On a positive note we would like to say that despite the congestion involved in living inside the Beltway, the twenty three homes that would be impacted by the State taking any of our property for the intersection improvements comprise valuable housing stock that contributes to the stability and beauty of the entire Chevy Chase Valley neighborhood. Many of the Connecticut Avenue residences have been remodeled (some recently), some are scheduled for remodeling, and at least two are relatively new. Many of our homes have been landscaped and improved. Living inside the Beltway keeps us from contributing to daily traffic congestion in the overall region and helps conserve energy. We are part of and serve as a buffer for Chevy Chase Valley. Our neighborhood has beautiful, mature trees, a view of parkland on several sides, and abundant wildlife (including rare black squirrels cited in the Environmental Impact Statement for this area). We hope to keep it a beautiful, safe neighborhood and minimize erosion of its quality of life and market values to accommodate to traffic demands.

We ask you to take our comments into consideration as you plan for the intersection improvements. We are willing to trade the median strip to retain our safety and quality of life, the value of our homes, and the charm of this neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Homeowners below abutting Connecticut Avenue between the Washington Beltway and Jones Bridge Road, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815

Nancy Wong, 8800 Connecticut Avenue; 301-642-3192; wuwenchia@yahoo.com
Benito/Mary DLuccia, 8804 Connecticut Ave; 301-656-3226
Esber/Jeanette Barakat, 3901 Parsons Rd; 301-657-2630; barakatea@state.gov
Bassam Dina, 8810 Connecticut Ave; 240-463-2421; bassamdina@quickaltd.com
Rosemary/John Mathias, 8812 Connecticut Ave; 301-656-2696
Holly/Kevin Hurst, 3900 Montrose Drive; 301-578140; hhurst@NorwoodSchool.org
Day Quick, 8902 Connecticut Ave; 202-834-7556; Dayquick@hotmail.com
Feng-Ying Lin, 3900 Woodlawn Rd; 240-899-2619; fengyingchiu@yahoo.com
Arnold/Freda Mitchem, 3901 Woodlawn Road; 301-654-8781; fmitchem@usa.net
Al/Colleen Andreine, 8908 Connecticut Ave; 301-907-0089; Alandreine@aol.com
L. Singh, 8911 Connecticut Ave; 202-236-4589; Lashdeep@yahoo.com
Jorge Delpino, 8909 Connecticut Ave; 301-529-4121; jgdelpino@aol.com
Monika Rukus, 8901 Connecticut Ave; 301-986-7906
Curtland Deville, 8921 Connecticut Ave; 301-656-6169; cdeville@csrees.usda.gov
Louis/Joanne Harron, 8915 Connecticut Avenue; 240-497-0488

Cc: Congressman Chris Van Hollen Jr.
State reps, both State Senate and House
Chairs of County and State Transportation Committees

John D. Porcari, State Transportation Secretary
Andrew Scott, Special Assistant for Economic Development
Isaiah Leggett, Montgomery County Executive
Phil Alperson, BRAC County coordinator
Jialin Tian, Transportation Engineer, SHA
Barbara Solberg, Transportation Engineer, SHA
Ken Strickland, President, Chevy Chase Valley Citizens Association
Adrian Andreassi, President, North Chevy Chase Village Council